since 1997. But officials and riders see more trends that help account for the rise in deaths.

As one rider noted, "Guys are buying bikes that are way too big and fast for them. These bikes shouldn't be on the street, they're so fast—they can go upward of 180 miles per hour—much less be ridden by someone with little experience."

Indeed, the average motorcycle engine, says the NHTSA, has increased from an average of 769 cc in 1990 to 959 cc in 2001, a jump of nearly 25 percent. A former employee of a motorcycle dealership said he quit because he couldn't stand watching powerful bikes being sold to novice riders. The difference, he said, is like "shooting a BB gun vs. shooting an AK-47. I made good money, but some things are more important than money."

According to police reports, several people who died last year were riding those large, fast bikes. Traffic detectives agree bigger bikes ridden by less-experienced riders have contributed to fatalities. But they quickly point out that intoxication, speeding, a lack of safety training, and a lack of helmets have added to the deadly mix.

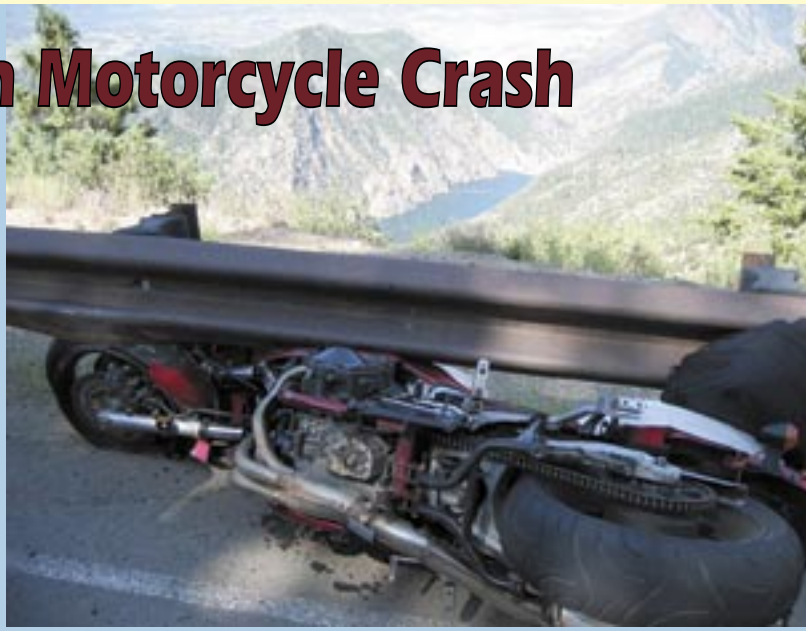
Riding a motorcycle is an inherently dangerous pastime—there's little disagreement on that statement. "When you're on a motorcycle, you just don't have any protection," said a police sergeant. "Even with a helmet, there's still a great deal of trauma to the body."

There are ways to mitigate these dangers. One of the most effective is a motorcycle safety-training course like the one the Navy has (required for all Navy people operating a motorcycle or riding one as a passenger, on or off base). Graduates of the course usually don't have as many serious accidents as those who don't. Even those who think they know how to ride are surprised at how much they learn.

*The hard part is getting people to keep practicing what they learn in the Navy's Motorcycle Rider Course. Consider the following example.*

# Navy Woman Dies in Motorcycle Crash

By Ken Testorff,
Naval Safety Center



Fatal motorcycle mishaps involving Navy and Marine Corps women are rare. However, Naval Safety Center statistics show that 18 have occurred since 1982. In eight of these cases, operators were killed; the remaining casualties were passengers. Here is a breakdown of the total fatalities to date:

1982 – 1
1984 – 2
1985 – 4
1986 – 2
1987 – 1
1988 – 2
1991 – 3
1993 – 1
1998 – 1
2004 – 1

The latest statistic was added Jan. 1, 2004. A 37-year-old Navy lieutenant was out riding her motorcycle with some friends at 0130 when she lost control, slid into oncoming traffic, and collided with a Jeep. The highway-patrol report lists "unsafe speed for the current road conditions" as the cause of the crash. She died of injuries to the lower part of her body.

According to the investigating officer, the victim was wearing a helmet, leather jacket and jeans. That PPE, however, doesn't meet all the

requirements *(see list at end of this article)* outlined in OpNav Instruction 5100.12G, which is covered extensively in the Navy's motorcycle rider course. The victim had completed that course in March 2001.

A 1984 high-school graduate, the victim joined the Navy in 1985, with hopes of becoming a translator. Instead, she became a dental hygienist for the next eight years. She then joined the Naval Reserve and went to dental school, graduating in 1998. Soon afterward, she was commissioned a lieutenant in the dental corps and spent four years overseas before being sent to San Diego for duty. She was scheduled to be discharged in August 2004.

As a result of this tragedy, the victim won't travel or climb any more mountains (she once climbed Mount Fuji). She also won't be able to pursue her interest in children's dental-health programs. More importantly, her parents will have to raise her 14-year-old daughter.

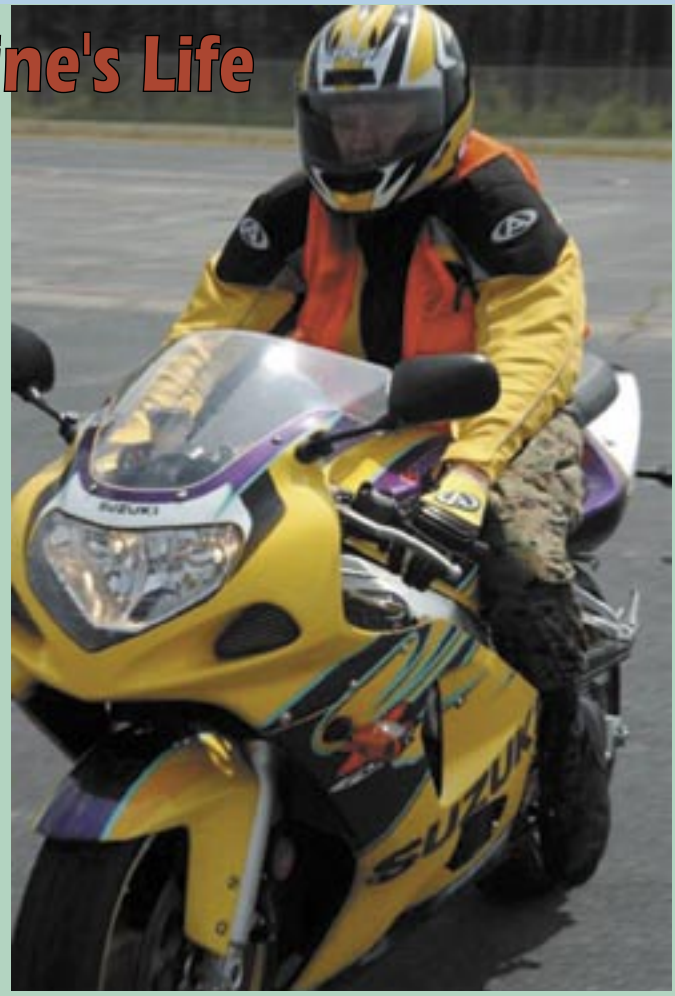
**OpNavInst 5100.12G requires all Navy people operating a motorcycle or riding one as a passenger, on or off base, to wear this equipment:**

- A helmet (meeting the U.S. DoT standard), with the chinstrap fastened securely under the chin.
- Eye-protective devices (impact or shatter-resistant goggles or full-face shield attached to the helmet). A windshield, fairing or eyeglasses alone are not proper eye protection.
- Long-sleeved shirt or jacket, long-legged trousers, and full-fingered gloves or mittens designed for use on a motorcycle.
- Sturdy footwear. Leather boots or over-the-ankle shoes are strongly encouraged.
- Brightly colored outer upper garment during the day and a reflective upper garment during the night. The outer upper garment must be clearly visible and cannot be covered. Military uniforms do not meet these criteria.

*If you need more convincing that PPE works for motorcyclists, consider the two testimonials that follow.*

# Helmet Saves Marine's Life

By VMGR-352




One Sunday, Sgt. Marty Cantrell was taking a leisurely ride on his shiny, new sport bike along the scenic highways of San Diego County. A fairly seasoned rider, Sgt. Cantrell had completed all the appropriate military and civilian motorcycle training. He also was smart enough to wear his full-face helmet, leather jacket, leather gloves, heavy-gauge jeans, and sturdy boots.

As Sgt. Cantrell slowed from 30 mph and turned his bike to take the onramp for another highway, he passed through an oil slick. The bike's tires lost traction with the road, and the bike slid out from under him. His head hit the pavement, and he lost consciousness while sliding 60 feet across the road.

When he regained consciousness, the dazed Sgt. Cantrell moved aimlessly across the onramp to the highway. The crash and subsequent slide had destroyed his helmet, leather jacket and gloves and had damaged his